Drowning

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/34459078.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	The Hobbit - All Media Types, The Hobbit (Jackson Movies)
Relationships:	Fem!Bilbo/Thranduil, Bilbo Baggins/Thranduil
Characters:	Thranduil (Tolkien), Bilbo Baggins, Fem!Bilbo - Character, Bard the Bowman, Tilda (Hobbit Movies), Bofur (Tolkien), Legolas Greenleaf
Additional Tags:	canon compliant death, Post-Battle of Five Armies, Leaving Erebor, Mirkwood, Enchanted River, Drowning, Rescue, Flirting, Confessions, First Kiss, Whumptober 2021
Language:	English
Series:	Part 10 of Whumptober 2021
Stats:	Published: 2021-10-12 Words: 2,802 Chapters: 1/1

Drowning

by Hisvoicebrokemyheart

Summary

Belladonna's only option was to return to the Shire. The ghosts of the sons of Durin would only haunt her in Erebor.

Notes

Whumptober Day 11: Drowning

I've had a Thranduil/Bilbo fic in the works for some time now, this prompt definitely sated some of my desire for that pairing.

Updates for this challenge will probably come a little slower as I've run out of the ones I pre-wrote.

See the end of the work for more notes

Belladonna knew that her only option was to return to the Shire. She couldn't bear to stay in Erebor, the ghosts of the sons of Durin would only haunt her all the more. Thorin's pain-addled plea for her forgiveness would fall upon no ears but her own. She couldn't allow herself to think that she could stay with them.

She left as night fell, arranging an escort in the form of Bard. Bofur called to her from the gates as she started her way down the mountain path, she could not find it in her to turn back and gaze upon him — a true confidant from the very start. He called for her safe travels and the hope for a seat at her table someday. The words washed over her, breaking the silence of the night, and she dropped her head to her chest and let the tears she'd been holding back for days flow freely.

Before she could stop herself she reached out for Bard's hand. She could feel as he tensed briefly in surprise before wrapping his large hand around her own. It was just enough to ground her. Somehow leaving the company behind her felt quite how it did when she'd left Bag End all that time ago.

Bard continued to cut his stride beside her, keeping the pace she set despite their size difference.

She cautioned a glance up at him.

"I only wish to stay until morning. Then I shall be on my way through Mirkwood," Bell nodded as to affirm her own decision. "Maybe I will be so lucky that the Elvenking would give me a place to rest my head."

Bard had to laugh, the hobbit as blunt and honest as she was when she entered the shared tent with the arkenstone in hand. And yet, she was disarmingly charming to boot.

"I would be happy to share what is left of hearth and home with you for the night Miss Baggins. My children will be happy to see you. They need a friendly face in these trying times."

They continued on in pursuit of Bard's living quarters. When they arrived, Tilda squealed and ran to Bell. The young girl threw her arms around her and Bell relished in her warmth. The joy in her already mending the woes that sat upon Bell's heart.

It would be a shame to leave so soon, but she must continue forward and put space between herself and such overwhelming loss.

When morning broke she was surprised to find that Bard had found her a pony to take to Mirkwood's edge.

She sent it along, back to the remnants of Dale, and faced the forest before her. Her first venture through these woods was daunting, and the weeks that followed in the shadows of King Thranduil's prison cells were enough to wear down even the strongest of warriors.

Bell counted herself lucky to be able to take the woodland path rather than cut through the thick of the forest. It was that that screamed of the dangers lying within.

The road would lead her to the heart of the kingdom, having to cross through to continue on her way, but she would gladly take the scrutiny from the Elvenking over another dance with those spiders.

Half a day's journey placed her well in the midst of the forest and she shivered in the lack of light. It was much too easy to lose track of time.

For the most part her journey was quiet. She walked the path alone and undisturbed.

When she finally did hear the pounding sound of a caravan approaching she dove off the side of the road into cover. She crouched beside the base of a large oak and watched as a large group of dwarves thundered down the road. They wore armor similar to that of Dain Ironfoot.

Bell guessed that they must be traveling west to meet the dwarves of Ered Luin who sought to return to the Lonely Mountain.

She would have to be careful. They wouldn't be the last party to take this path with her. There was no telling what the response would be if any of them recognized her — a traitor of the King who never would be crowned.

She could feel the heat of her ring burning in the chest pocket of her vest, but ignored its call. When a dwarf at the back of the pack turned in her direction she jolted back.

The swift movement shifted the fallen foliage at her feet and the bare sole slipped against the riot covered ground. She careened backward and began to roll down deeper into the woods. As the world blurred in her vision she thought she caught a glimpse of water quickly approaching.

Momentum from her descent threw her into the frigid river that cut across the expanse of the land. Her meager belongings felt like a lead weight on her back and her clothing took up water like a sponge. Hobbits never were made to swim, built too sturdy at the sacrifice of natural buoyancy.

True fear settled in her as she quickly began to tire. She barely had time to struggle as dark tendrils of exhaustion slithered in and around her, vision fading.

A strong grip embraced her, pulling her from the depth, and she wondered if this was what it was to finally face eternity.

When she woke it was still dark. Lady Yavanna would have welcomed her into her arms with a great light — it was the lack of this that allowed her to believe she was still alive. That, and the aching pain in her chest and abdomen.

A hand brushed errant curls from her face and prompted her to open her eyes. She was met with Legolas' friendly gaze.

"Belladonna," a smile spread across his face. "I am happy to see you awake."

“How—” Bell’s voice rasped before a cough stole her words from her.

“My father.” A bit of mirth snuck into his tone. “He watched you fall while out leading a hunting party. They’ve been doing very well taking down rogue cells of those spiders. It was your dedication to Erebor’s royal family and the risk that you took for their benefit that showed him how a ruler could do so much more if only they went out and fought for what was theirs.”

He handed her a mug filled with cool water. She could taste the honey that was stirred into it on her tongue and it soothed her throat on the way down.

“He wants to speak with you. You’ve made quite the impression on him. Not a day goes by where I don’t catch him ruminating on how you managed to escape these halls with thirteen dwarves in tow to boot.”

Bell blushed, embarrassed by the call out. It was bad enough that Thranduil had mentioned it to her when they first met, but to know that he still thought of it made her nervous.

“I believe he’s retired to his chambers, possibly his study. A brief walk may do you some good if you’re feeling up to it.”

Legolas stood to offer her his hand in assistance which she kindly took. She swayed on her feet for a moment and he moved his free hand to her shoulder, ducking down to catch her eye.

“Easy now, Miss,” he soothed. “You’ve had quite the day.”

She nodded before moving one foot in front of the other, Legolas falling to her side but staying close enough to catch her if she became unmoored once more. Her body was sore, she felt it in every step.

Her mind wandered to the first time she laid eyes on the Elvenking. Thorin stood before his throne and denied Thranduil’s offer — a favor for a favor. She watched from the ring’s shadows as Thorin ripped into Thranduil calling him all but a coward for turning his back on the dwarves as they suffered. When Thranduil’s skin bled away to reveal severe trauma she nearly gave herself up with a gasp. The dragons of the north, unheard of for some time now. It was easy to forget that looking at elves, delicate as they appear, was looking into the face of immortality.

They stopped before a tall wooden door set into the stone face of the expansive walls. The halls of the Elvenking were a cave system in their own right, dwelling in the depths of Mirkwood and stretching up to the treetops.

Legolas knocked and entered without hesitation, waving her in behind him as he went. The room rivaled the size of Bag End in its entirety and extended well above the height of the hobbit hole. Light trickled in from above and mingled with the flickering candlelight spread across the room. It was warm and inviting in contrast to its size.

A large table sat in the very middle of the room, round with at least a dozen chairs spread around it. Charts and maps were laid across it, as well as what Bell would guess was half written scrolls. Ink pots with intricate scrolling on the glass and quills with magnificently carved wooden grips called out to her from where they sat.

Her gaze moved beyond the tables to take in tall towers of books and anthologies, historical texts and journals. A large desk sat nestled in one corner, crowded with documents. The suggestion of clutter brought down the nerves that threatened to wrap around Bell.

Thranduil embodied every bit of his eternal nature. It was intimidating, but the small details of the room exposed another side that Bell was sure went largely unseen.

She visually combed through the rest of the room until finally she looked to where Legolas had continued on to meet his father. He sat before a fireplace that must have been the sole source of heat to the room. There were a few padded chairs facing the flames, and Bell had the strongest urge to curl herself up in one, never to leave its embrace.

Legolas turned to her and beckoned her over from where she stood near the door, his father shifting his gaze to focus on her as well. Her steps were measured and careful as she crossed the floor, the mixture of the cool stone of the ground and small runners of soft fabric contrasted under her feet.

When she made it to where they were situated Legolas smiled at her once more. She looked to Thranduil only to find that his sight was already set on her.

“Please,” his voice was like honey. “Do sit.”

She took up one of the chairs she had eyed before and tucked her feet up under herself.

“I shall leave you two be. Goodnight, Father,” Legolas bid him farewell. He turned his attention to Bell who had curled her feet under herself in the chair. “I trust you will find your way.”

His statement was leading, and yet she still nearly missed it.

“Hmm—” Bell worked to recall the words that had only just been spoken. She could barely take her eyes from Thranduil. A million questions for her were hidden behind the neutral expression on his face. His inquisitive eyes betrayed him. “I will, yes.”

If Bell looked at him, she would have seen Legolas biting down on a wicked smirk. He huffed a quiet laugh to himself when he shut himself out of the room.

“Belladonna Baggins,” the king mused. “Usurper of Smaug the Terrible and Defendant of Kings — to what does Mirkwood owe this honor?”

His tone straddled both mockery and awe, and Bell found it impossible to parse out just what he was implying with that.

“I merely wish to seek a few days lodging before I am to continue on the path back to the Shire. It is time I returned from whence I came. I only wish I was able to come to this point

by passing through your gates, not through rescue as a damsel in distress."

"We were both, as it seems, in luck that my hunting party was passing through." The barest hint of satisfaction worked it's way across Thranduil's face. "I have wanted after a conversation with you for some time now. Though I must ask, you were filled with such pride and camaraderie for your *dwarves* when we first met. What changed to send you on such a treacherous journey once more?"

Silence rose between them with Thranduil's inquiry laid out on the floor. Truly, why did she leave?

"If I may be so bold, you saw it yourself. Thorin all but threw me from the ramparts for what I'd done to him, to all of them. In the wake of the battle he called to me, wishing to atone. It was all for naught as I watched him and his nephews die up on Ravenhill."

Tears sprang in her eyes, remembering such loss.

"How am I to know if any of it was true? Both the banishment and the forgiveness. It would destroy me to hear the truth of it."

Her distress moved Thranduil to his core, such an enchanting creature she was. He rose from his seat and took but a single stride to close the distance that separated them.

He came down to his knees in front of her. She held her breath as his large hands wrapped around her waist and pulled her toward him. Her feet dropped down to the floor between his legs with the movement, and standing at her full height put her a head above him as he sat back on his heels.

His fingers spread across her torso. Bell could feel where the very tips of his thumbs brushed the underside of her breasts through the gown she'd been dressed in. She shivered at the touch and cast her gaze down to look him in the eye.

Thranduil was such a sight looking up at her, and she wondered if anyone else had ever seen him quite like this. He wore no crown in his own chambers, and donned a simple gown of his own. His hair flowed freely and cascaded over his shoulders.

She felt as one hand lifted away from her and marvelled at the loss of warmth. He reached out and tucked her errant curls behind her ear. His fingers danced across the tip of her ear and the gasp she let out at the sensation broke the silence between them like the crack of a whip.

"When I saw you sink into my river I saw a gift in the shape of you that I could only ever wish to receive. That I reached you in time was only the least I could do in exchange for your company."

He was both sin and sweetness.

"You are so much more than the castaway of a broken king."

She was enchanted. Never had Bell found herself to be such an object of desire. She melted into him and he rose to meet her. Straightened up on his knees he gained only a piece of his

rightful height advantage, but it was enough.

“Thranduil—”

Bell’s voice was nothing more than a breath.

Her arms came up to hold him in return. Flush against him, she nosed at the underside of his chin. His skin was satin smooth as her lips touched against his throat in something that wasn’t quite a kiss.

“If you would grant me a single wish more, I would selfishly ask that you stay.”

He pulled away only to kiss her but once. Such a small display of desire, and yet it had her aching for the far and nearly forgotten touch of intimacy.

Thranduil rose to his full height, reluctance to put space between them was clear in the way he held himself. Bell watched as he held out a hand to her.

She nodded once to herself and smiled up at him before she slipped her hand into his and allowed him to walk her into his bedchamber.

When Bell woke the next morning she slipped from the bed and padded her way back out to the study. She took up a seat in one of the large chairs surrounding the center table and grabbed a clean piece of parchment. Using the ink and quill she had her eye on the day before, she began to write.

Bofur —
I don’t quite know how to say this, but my table may not be as far away as we both may have thought. This will come as a great surprise to you, as it did to me — I am staying in Mirkwood per the request of King Thranduil.
I think it will be good for me.
Your friend,
Belladonna Baggins

End Notes

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